

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

LETTERS AND SOUNDS

by Morgan Nilsson



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What does the alphabet look like?

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Traditional Arabic order:

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Traditional Arabic order:

'	B	T	J	X	KH	D	R
S	SH	DH	C	G	F	Q	K
L	M	N	W	H	Y		

What does the alphabet look like?

Traditional Arabic order:

' B T J X KH D R

S SH DH C G F Q K

L M N W H Y

A E I O U

What does the alphabet look like?

1. b)

t)

j)

x)

2. b)

t)

j)

x)

kh)

What does the alphabet look like?

But when sorting names or words:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y

What does the alphabet look like?

But when sorting names or words:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O Q R S T U V W X Y

P, V, Z are not used in Somali.

What does the alphabet look like?

But when sorting names or words:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O Q R S T U W X Y

DH, KH, SH are treated like SH, CH in English:
TWO letters representing one sound.

What does the alphabet look like?

But when sorting names or words:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O Q R S T U W X Y

DH, KH, SH are treated like SH, CH in English:
TWO letters representing one sound.

They are not treated as “complex” letters
like CH, LL in Spanish.

How are the sounds pronounced?

5 vowel letters

A

E

I

O

U

How are the sounds pronounced?

5 vowel letters

A	E	I	O	U
arm	less	sit	hot	soup

How are the sounds pronounced?

5 vowel letters, but 10 vowel sounds

A	E	I	O	U
arm	less	sit	hot	soup

How are the sounds pronounced?

5 vowel letters, but 10 vowel sounds

	A	E	I	O	U
“light”	arm	less	sit	hot	soup
“heavy”					

How are the sounds pronounced?

5 vowel letters, but 10 vowel sounds

	A	E	I	O	U
“light”	arm	less	sit	hot	soup
“heavy”	apple	convey	police	sœur	sur

How are the sounds pronounced?

5 vowel letters, but 10 vowel sounds

	A	E	I	O	U
“light”	arm	less	sit	hot	soup
“heavy”	apple	convey	police	sœur	sur

The “light” (ordinary) vowel sounds are more frequent than the “heavy” (tense) ljuden.

How are the sounds pronounced?

Long vowels are written as double:

AA EE II OO UU

In total:

10 short and 10 long vowel sounds

How are the sounds pronounced?

B D F G H J K L M N S SH T W Y

similar to English

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B D F G H J K L M N S SH T W Y

similar to English

R similar to Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic

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B D F G H J K L M N S SH T W Y

similar to English

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DH similar to Swedish or Norwegian **RD**

How are the sounds pronounced?

B D F G H J K L M N S SH T W Y

similar to English

R similar to Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic

DH similar to Swedish or Norwegian **RD**

KH similar to German or Scottish **CH**

How are the sounds pronounced?

C similar to Arabic ع Cali, Cumar

How are the sounds pronounced?

C similar to Arabic ع Cali, Cumar

Q similar to Arabic ق qalin, Muqdisho

How are the sounds pronounced?

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| C | similar to Arabic ع | Cali, Cumar |
| Q | similar to Arabic ق | qalin, Muqdisho |
| X | similar to Arabic ح | Xasan, Ubax |

How are the sounds pronounced?

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| C | similar to Arabic ع | Cali, Cumar |
| Q | similar to Arabic ق | qalin, Muqdisho |
| X | similar to Arabic ح | Xasan, Ubax |
| ‘ | glottal stop, similar to Arabic ء | go'aan |

How are the sounds pronounced?

BB DD GG LL MM NN RR
also occur as double, more intense.

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A single B D G between vowels is “slacker” or “softer”,
the air flow is not completely blocked, just almost.

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A single B D G between vowels is “slacker” or “softer”,
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Similar to Spanish or Greek.

How are the sounds pronounced?

BB DD GG LL MM NN RR
also occur as double, more intense.

A single B D G between vowels is “slacker” or “softer”,
the air flow is not completely blocked, just almost.

Similar to Spanish or Greek.

Phonetic symbols: [β], [ð], [ɣ].

How are the sounds pronounced?

More to follow about

- the 10 vowel sounds,
- the more difficult consonants.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

DO NOUNS BELONG TO DIFFERENT GENDERS?

by Morgan Nilsson



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WHAT IS GENDER?

Biologically: the sex of a living being.

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Gramatically: an inherent property of each noun that makes other words behave in different ways when they combine with a specific noun.

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Biologically: the sex of a living being.

Gramatically: an inherent property of each noun that makes other words behave in different ways when they combine with a specific noun.

Slovenian: masc.	nov	dan	'new day'
fem.	nov	a kava	'new coffee'
neutre	nov	o mesto	'new city'

GENDER OF NOUNS

Many languages don't divide nouns grammatically into different gender groups.

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Finnish, Hungarian and Persian don't even make a distinction between the pronouns **she** and **he**.

Finnish	hän	<i>she / he</i>
Hungarian	ő	<i>she / he</i>
Persian	u	<i>she / he</i>

GENDER OF NOUNS

English does make a distinction between **he**, **she** and **it**, but it's not a real grammatical distinction, but rather a biological one.

GENDER OF NOUNS

English does make a distinction between **he**, **she** and **it**, but it's not a real grammatical distinction, but rather a biological one.

Talking about your cat, dog or other pet, you can use any of **he**, **she** and **it**, depending on how you wish to characterise the pet.

GENDER OF NOUNS

Languages like French, Spanish, Italian, German, Slavic languages and Arabic have a strictly grammatical gender system.

GENDER OF NOUNS

Languages like French, Spanish, Italian, German, Slavic languages and Arabic have a strictly grammatical gender system.

E.g., in many languages the definite and indefinite articles are different for nouns belonging to the different gender groups.

GENDER OF NOUNS

French has two genders:

un jour	<i>a day</i>	le jour	<i>the day</i>	masc.
une ville	<i>a city</i>	la ville	<i>the city</i>	fem.

GENDER OF NOUNS

French has two genders:

un jour	<i>a day</i>	le jour	<i>the day</i>	masc.
une ville	<i>a city</i>	la ville	<i>the city</i>	fem.

German has three genders:

ein Hafen	der Hafen	'the harbour'	masc.
ein Haus	das Haus	'the house'	neutre
eine Hand	die Hand	'the hand'	fem.

Two genders in Somali

Two genders in Somali

kab 'shoe' kab**ta** 'the shoe'

Two genders in Somali

kab	'shoe'	kab ta	' the shoe'
dab	'fire'	dab ka	' the fire'

Two genders in Somali

kab	'shoe'	kab ta	' the shoe'
dab	'fire'	dab ka	' the fire'

Sw.	'sko'	'skon n '
-----	-------	------------------

Two genders in Somali

kab	'shoe'	kab ta	' the shoe'
dab	'fire'	dab ka	' the fire'

Sw.	'sko'	'skon n '
Bu.	'obuvka'	'obuvkata ta '

Two genders in Somali

kab	'shoe'	kab ta	' the shoe'	feminine
dab	'fire'	dab ka	' the fire'	masculine

Feminine – Masculine

kab

kab**ta**

'the shoe'

t

–

k

dab

dab**ka**

'the fire'

Feminine – Masculine

kab

kab**ta**

'the shoe'

mind

mind**da**

'the knife'

t

–

k

d

–

g

dab

dab**ka**

'the fire'

guri

guri**ga**

'the house'

Feminine – Masculine

kab

kab**ta**

'the shoe'

mind

mind**ida**

'the knife'

bil

bi**sha**

'the moon, month'

t

—

k

d

—

g

sh

—

h

dab

dab**ka**

'the fire'

guri

guri**ga**

'the house'

fure

fura**ha**

'the key'

Feminine – Masculine

kab**ta** 'the shoe' dab**ka** 'the fire'

Feminine – Masculine

kab**ta** 'the shoe'

ay 'she/it'

taas

tay**da**

dab**ka** 'the fire'

uu 'he/it'

kaas 'that'

kay**ga** 'my/mine'

Feminine – Masculine

kab**ta** 'the shoe'

ay 'she/it'

taas

tay**d**a

tahay

heest**t**aa

heesay**s**aa

dab**k**a 'the fire'

uu 'he/it'

kaas 'that'

kay**g**a 'my/mine'

yahay 'is'

heesaa 'sings'

heesayaa 'is singing'

Feminine – Masculine

kab**ta** 'the shoe'

ay 'she/it'

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dab**ka** 'the fire'

uu 'he/it'

kaas 'that'

kay**ga** 'my/mine'

yahay 'is'

heesaa 'sings'

heesayaa 'is singing'

but only one common form of adjectives

Feminine – Masculine

More about

- the definite article
- different pronouns
- different forms of the verb

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

Is there a definite and
an indefinite article?

by Morgan Nilsson



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Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

English

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

no article

English
shoe

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English
no article	shoe
indefinite article	

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English
no article	shoe
indefinite article	a shoe

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English
no article	shoe
indefinite article	a shoe
definite article	

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English
no article	shoe
indefinite article	a shoe
definite article	the shoe

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English
no article	shoe
indefinite article	a shoe
definite article	the shoe
numeral	

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English
no article	shoe
indefinite article	a shoe
definite article	the shoe
numeral	one shoe

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English	Somali
no article	shoe	
indefinite article	a shoe	
definite article	the shoe	
numeral	one shoe	

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English	Somali
no article	shoe	kab
indefinite article	a shoe	
definite article	the shoe	
numeral	one shoe	

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English	Somali
no article	shoe	kab
indefinite article	a shoe	—
definite article	the shoe	
numeral	one shoe	

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English	Somali
no article	shoe	kab
indefinite article	a shoe	—
definite article	the shoe	kabta
numeral	one shoe	

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

	English	Somali
no article	shoe	kab
indefinite article	a shoe	—
definite article	the shoe	kabta
numeral	one shoe	hal kab

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

no article

kab

shoe

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

no article

kab

shoe

definite article

kabta

the shoe

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

no article

kab

indefinite form

shoe

definite article

kabta

definite form

the shoe

Is there a definite and an indefinite article?

More about

- the form of the definite article.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

HOW TO FORM THE PLURAL OF NOUNS

by Morgan Nilsson



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How to form the plural of nouns

What about English?

How to form the plural of nouns

Almost all English plurals are form with the ending –s.
cats, dogs, houses, lakes, parks, pupils...

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Sometimes an extra -e- is added: watch, watches

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A few alternations occur: leaf, leaves

How to form the plural of nouns

Almost all English plurals are form with the ending -s.
cats, dogs, houses, lakes, parks, pupils...

Sometimes an extra -e- is added: watch, watches

A few alternations occur: leaf, leaves

And a few are irregular: child, children; ox, oxen

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal aabb**e** 'father' aabb**ayaal**

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal aabbe **e** 'father' aabb**ayaal**
-ooyin

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal	aabb e 'father'	aabb ayaal
-ooyin	hooy o 'mother'	hooy ooyin

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal aabb**e** 'father' aabb**ayaal**

-ooyin hooy**o** 'mother' hooy**ooyin**

reduplication: monosyllabic masculine words

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal aabb**e** 'father' aabb**ayaal**

-ooyin hooy**o** 'mother' hooy**ooyin**

reduplication: monosyllabic masculine words

miis 'table' miis**as**

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal aabb**e** 'father' aabb**ayaal**

-ooyin hooy**o** 'mother' hooy**ooyin**

reduplication: monosyllabic masculine words

miis 'table' miis**as**

-o for all other words

How to form the plural of nouns

Somali has four different endings:

-ayaal aabb**e** 'father' aabb**ayaal**

-ooyin hooy**o** 'mother' hooy**ooyin**

reduplication: monosyllabic masculine words

miis 'table' miis**as**

-o for all other words

kab 'shoe' (f.) kab**o**

How to form the plural of nouns

-o is the most common plural marker.

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Before this -o sound alternations occur in many words.

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Before this -o sound alternations occur in many words.

baabuur 'car'

baabuurro 'cars'

How to form the plural of nouns

-o is the most common plural marker.

Before this -o sound alternations occur in many words.

baabuur	'car'	baabuurro	'cars'
yaxaas	'crocodile'	yaxaasyo	'crocodiles'

How to form the plural of nouns

-o is the most common plural marker.

Before this -o sound alternations occur in many words.

baabuur 'car'

baabuurro 'cars'

yaxaas 'crocodile'

yaxaaso 'crocodiles'

jilib 'knee'

jilbo 'knees'

How to form the plural of nouns

More to follow about

- plural by reduplication,
- plural forms in **-o**.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

More about plural forms in -o

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More about plural forms in -o

Plural in -o applies for the majority of nouns.

More about plural forms in -o

Plural in -o applies for
feminine nouns not ending in -o

singular		plural
hooyo	<i>mother</i>	hooyooyin

More about plural forms in -o

Plural in -o applies for
feminine nouns not ending in -o,
masculine nouns not ending in -e

singular

plural

hooyo *mother* hooyooyin

aabbe *father* aabbayaal

More about plural forms in -o

Plural in -o applies for
feminine nouns not ending in -o,
masculine nouns not ending in -e
having more than one syllable.

singular

plural

hooyo *mother* hooyooyin

aabbe *father* aabbayaal

af *mouth* afaf

More about plural forms in -o

All feminine nouns
that don't end in –o in the singular
add –o to form the plural.

More about plural forms in -o

All feminine nouns
that don't end in –o in the singular
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singular		plural
kab	<i>shoe</i>	kabo
sariir	<i>bed</i>	sariiro

More about plural forms in -o

All feminine nouns
that don't end in –o in the singular
add –o to form the plural.

singular		plural
kab	<i>shoe</i>	kabo
sariir	<i>bed</i>	sariiro

After -i a -y- is inserted between the vowels:

mind	<i>kniv</i>	mindiy
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More about plural forms in -o

A few feminine nouns
have a "complicated" singular form.

More about plural forms in -o

A few feminine nouns
have a "complicated" singular form.

Words cannot end in /m/.

More about plural forms in -o

A few feminine nouns
have a "complicated" singular form.

Words cannot end in /m/.

plural

timo

hair

singular

*tim

> tin

More about plural forms in -o

A few feminine nouns
have a "complicated" singular form.

Word cannot end in two consonants.

More about plural forms in -o

A few feminine nouns
have a "complicated" singular form.

Word cannot end in two consonants.
A copy of the vowel is inserted.

plural

gacmo

hands

singular

*gacm > gacan

More about plural forms in -o

A few feminine nouns
have a "complicated" singular form.

Word cannot end in two consonants.
A copy of the vowel is inserted.

plural

singular

gacmo

hands

*gacm > gacan

In a few words another vowel is inserted.

maalmo

days

*maalm > maalin

More about plural forms in -o

Masculine nouns **not** ending in **-e**
with more than one **syllable**
forms the plural by adding -o.

More about plural forms in -o

Masculine nouns **not** ending in **–e**
with more than one **syllable**
forms the plural by adding -o.

But

- some have an extra vowel in the singular

More about plural forms in -o

Masculine nouns **not** ending in **–e**
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But

- some have an extra vowel in the singular,
- some double the final consonant before -o

More about plural forms in -o

Masculine nouns **not** ending in **–e**
with more than one **syllable**
forms the plural by adding -o.

But

- some have an extra vowel in the singular,
- some double the final consonant before -o,
- some add -y- before -o.

More about plural forms in -o

The stem of certain masculine nouns ends with two consonants. This only shows in the plural. Somali words only end with a single consonant. In the singular an extra vowel is inserted.

singular	plural
*xarf > xaraf <i>letter</i>	xarfo <i>letters</i>
*hilb > hilib <i>meat</i>	hilbo <i>pieces of meat</i>

More about plural forms in -o

Somali words do not end in **m** or **k**.
They are replaced by **n** and **g** word-finally.

plural

ilko *teeth*

singular

*ilk > ilig *tooth*

More about plural forms in -o

Masculine nouns that end in **b, d, r, l, n** double the final consonant.

saaxiib	<i>friend</i>	saaxiibbo	<i>friends</i>
baabuur	<i>car</i>	baabuurro	<i>cars</i>
xayawaan	<i>animal</i>	xayawaanno	<i>animals</i>

More about plural forms in -o

Masculine nouns that end in **b, d, r, l, n** double the final consonant.

saaxiib	<i>friend</i>	saaxi bb o	<i>friends</i>
baabuur	<i>car</i>	baabuu rr o	<i>cars</i>
xayawaan	<i>animal</i>	xayawaan nn o	<i>animals</i>

In certain words the stem ends in /m/, but word-finally it is replaced by /n/.

dukaan n	<i>shop</i>	dukaam mm o	<i>shops</i>
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More about plural forms in -o

All other masculine nouns add a -y-.

singular

plural

libaax *lion*

libaaxyo *lions*

magac *name*

magacyo *names*

xafiis *office*

xafiisyo *offices*

kursi *chair*

kursiyo *chairs*

More about plural forms in -o

All other masculine nouns add a -y-.

singular

plural

libaax *lion*

libaaxyo *lions*

magac *name*

magacyo *names*

xafiis *office*

xafiisyo *offices*

kursi *chair*

kursiyo *chairs*

Words that end in -y don't add another -y-.

eray *word*

erayo *words*

Summary of plural forms in -o

Feminine nouns: Just -o.

kab kabo *shoes*

Masculine with inserted vowel in sing.: Just -o.

xaraf xaro *letters*

Masc. in b,d,l,n/m,r: Double consonant before -o.

baabuur baabuurro *cars*

Other masculine nouns: Insert -y- before -o.

xafiis xafiisyo *offices*

More about plural forms in -o

More about

- irregular plural forms,
- Arabic plural forms,
- collective nouns.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

HOW TO FORM THE DEFINITE PLURAL OF NOUNS

by Morgan Nilsson



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How to form the definite plural of nouns

What about English?

How to form the definite plural of nouns

In English, the definite form always contains the definite article **the**, both in the singular and in the plural.

How to form the definite plural of nouns

In English, the definite form always contains the definite article **the**, both in the singular and in the plural.

car	the car
cars	the cars

How to form the definite plural of nouns

Somali makes use of definite suffixes or endings.

How to form the definite plural of nouns

Somali makes use of definite suffixes or endings.

Which suffix to use depends on the gender of the noun.

How to form the definite plural of nouns

Feminine nouns take the definite plural suffix **-ka**.

-OOYINKA

Feminine nouns take the definite plural suffix **-ka**.

Plurals in **-ooyin** therefore have a definite form in **-ooyinka**.

-OOYINKA

Feminine nouns take the definite plural suffix **-ka**.

Plurals in **-ooyin** therefore have a definite form in **-ooyinka**.

hooyo
mother

hooyooyin
mothers

hooyooyinka
the mothers

-AHA

Feminine nouns take the definite plural suffix **-ka**.

Plurals in **-o** have a definite form in **-aha**.

-AHA

Feminine nouns take the definite plural suffix **-ka**.

Plurals in **-o** have a definite form in **-aha**.

Notice that **-o-** changes to **-a-** before the suffix and **-k-** in the suffix changes to **-h-** after this **-a-**.

This is in accordance with general rules of Somali.

-AHA

Feminine nouns take the definite plural suffix **-ka**.

Plurals in **-o** have a definite form in **-aha**.

kab
shoe

kabo
shoes

kabaha
the shoes

How to form the definite plural of nouns

Masculine nouns take different endings depending on how long the words are.

How to form the definite plural of nouns

Masculine nouns take different endings depending on how long the words are.

Nouns with two syllables in the plural take the definite **–ka**.

How to form the definite plural of nouns

Masculine nouns take different endings depending on how long the words are.

Nouns with two syllables in the plural take the definite **–ka**.

Nouns with more syllables in the plural take the definite **-ta**.

-KA

Masculine bisyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ka**.

Nouns with reduplication therefore have the same definite suffix in the singular and the plural.

-KA

Masculine bisyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ka**.

Nouns with reduplication therefore have the same definite suffix in the singular and the plural.

miis
table

miiska
the table

miisas
tables

miisaska
the tables

-AHA

Masculine bisyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ka**.

Some nouns lose a vowel in the plural, which is formed by adding –o. These nouns have a definite form in **-aha**.

-AHA

Masculine bisyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ka**.

Some nouns lose a vowel in the plural, which is formed by adding –o. These nouns have a definite form in **-aha**.

jil**i**b

knee

jil**i**bka

the knee

jilbo

knees

jilba**aha**

the knees

How to form the definite plural of nouns

Masculine polysyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ta**.

-AYAASHA

Masculine polysyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ta**.

Nouns with a plural in **-ayaal** have a definite form in **-ayaasha**, since **l + t > sh**.

-AYAASHA

Masculine polysyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ta**.

Nouns with a plural in **-ayaal** have a definite form in **-ayaasha**, since **l + t > sh**.

aabbe	aabbaha	aabbayaal	aabbayaasha
<i>father</i>	<i>the father</i>	<i>fathers</i>	<i>the fathers</i>

-ADA

Masculine polysyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ta**.

Nouns with a polysyllabic plural in **-o** have a definite form in **-ada**, since **t** > **d** after a vowel.

-ADA

Masculine polysyllabic plurals take the definite suffix **-ta**.

Nouns with a polysyllabic plural in **-o** have a definite form in **-ada**, since **t > d** after a vowel.

3 syllables

saaxiib
friend

saaxiibka
the friend

saaxiibbo
friends

saaxiibbada
the friends

Summary

Feminine nouns: -ka (-ha)

hooy**ooyin**

hooy**ooyinka**

kab**o**

kab**aha**

Summary

Feminine nouns: -ka (-ha)

hooy**ooyin**

hooy**ooyinka**

kab**o**

kab**aha**

Masculine nouns with a **bisyllabic** plural: -ka (-ha)

miis**as**

miis**aska**

jilb**o**

jilb**aha**

Summary

Feminine nouns: -ka (-ha)

hooy**ooyin**

hooy**ooyinka**

kab**o**

kab**aha**

Masculine nouns with a **bisyllabic** plural: -ka (-ha)

miis**as**

miis**aska**

jilb**o**

jilb**aha**

Masc. nouns with a **polysyllabic** pl.: -ta (-sha, -da)

aabb**ayaal**

aabb**ayaasha**

saaxiibb**o**

saaxiibb**ada**

How to form the definite plural of nouns

More to follow about

- sound alternations in the plural,
- irregular definite plural forms.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

WHAT ARE UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

by Morgan Nilsson



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

What are uncountable nouns?

Not all nouns have both a singular and a plural form.

What are uncountable nouns?

Not all nouns have both a singular and a plural form.

For some words a plural seems impossible.

What are uncountable nouns?

Not all nouns have both a singular and a plural form.

For some words a plural seems impossible.

advice, damage, furniture, homework

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advice, damage, furniture, homework

For some words it is possible, but a bit strange or unusual.

What are uncountable nouns?

Not all nouns have both a singular and a plural form.

For some words a plural seems impossible.

advice, damage, furniture, homework

For some words it is possible, but a bit strange or unusual.

anger, honey, gold, wine, tea

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns don't have a singular form.
clothes, stairs, oats

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns don't have a singular form.

clothes, stairs, oats

customs, manners, arms, drugs

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns don't have a singular form.

clothes, stairs, oats

customs, manners, arms, drugs

Some plural nouns may denote one item.

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns don't have a singular form.

clothes, stairs, oats

customs, manners, arms, drugs

Some plural nouns may denote one item.

binoculars, scissors, glasses, trousers, jeans

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns don't have a plural ending,
but denote many items.

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns don't have a plural ending,
but denote many items.

people, police, cattle, clergy

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns have a singular and a plural,
but also the singular denotes several 'members'.

What are uncountable nouns?

Some nouns have a singular and a plural,
but also the singular denotes several 'members'.

committee, crew, family, team

What are uncountable nouns?

Such phenomena are even more common in Somali than in English...

What are uncountable nouns?

It might be confusing:

Which words are actually in the plural?

What are uncountable nouns?

It's important to make a distinction

between **form** and **meaning**!

What are uncountable nouns?

It's important to make a distinction

between **form** and **meaning**!

Plural is a **form** with a plural **ending**!

What are uncountable nouns?

It's important to make a distinction between **form** and **meaning**!

Plural is a **form** with a plural ending!

Some **singular forms** denote **several items**.

What are uncountable nouns?

It's important to make a distinction between **form** and **meaning**!

Plural is a **form** with a plural ending!

Some **singular forms** denote **several items**.

Some **plural forms** denote **a single item**.

What are uncountable nouns?

More about number, such as...

- substances milk, tea, sugar, meat
- general number fruit, trousers, scissors
- collective nouns people, police, cattle
- group nouns family, crew, committee
- generic singular The spider has eight legs.
- defective nouns clothes, goods

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

MORE ABOUT NOUNS WITH GENERAL NUMBER

by Morgan Nilsson



| MORGAN NILSSON | SOMALI GRAMMAR | HOW TO FORM THE PLURAL OF NOUNS

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More about nouns with general number

Some Somali nouns only have only one form with respect to number. It doesn't say anything about the number of objects. It might be one item or many. There aren't separate singular and plural forms.

Axmed waxa uu sawirayaa muus.

Ahmed is drawing (a) banana(s).

In Somali this phenomenon is extremely common with respect to words denoting fruit and vegetables.

More about nouns with general number

In Somali this phenomenon is extremely common with respect to words denoting fruit and vegetables.

But it also occurs with some other nouns.

Hooyo waxa ay kalluun ku iibinaysaa suuqa.

Mother is selling fish in the market.

More about nouns with general number

Other nouns that have general number are e.g.

liin

citric fruit(s)

tufaax

apple(s)

qare

watermelon(s)

karooto

carrot(s)

nacnac

candy, sweet(s), drop(s)

buskud

cookie(s)

kalluun

fish

More about nouns with general number

In Somali such nouns can only be used in this general manner and they do not have a separate plural form.

More about nouns with general number

They usually can't be directly preceded by a numeral.

The word **xabbo** *piece, item* and the verb **ah** *that is* has to be added.

hal xabbo oo moos ah

one item that banana is, i.e. one banana

laba xabbo oo moos ah

two items that banana are, i.e. two bananas

More about nouns with general number

They usually can't be directly preceded by a numeral.

Some nouns manage without **xabbo** *piece, item*. But the verb **ah** *that is* is still necessary after the noun, since it is uncountable.

toddoba nacnac ah

seven that are sweet(s), i.e. seven

More about nouns with general number

A few nouns of this typ are used without the verb **ah**, just like countable nouns.

Jaamac wuxuu soo dabtay afar kalluun.

Jama caught four fish.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

How do Somali numbers work?

by Morgan Nilsson



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

How do Somali numbers work?

0	eber	9	sagaal	
1	kow	10	toban	100 boqol
2	labo/laba	20	labaatan	200 laba boqol
3	saddex			
4	afar			
5	shan			
6	lix			
7	toddobo/-a			
8	siddeed			

How do Somali numbers work?

0	eber	9	sagaal		
1	kow	10	toban	100	boqol
2	labo/laba	20	labaatan	200	laba boqol
3	saddex				
4	afar	25	shan iyo labaatan – 80%		
5	shan		labaatan iyo shan – 20%		
6	lix				
7	toddobo/-a				
8	siddeed				

How do Somali numbers work?

0	eber	9	sagaal		
1	kow	10	toban	100	boqol
2	labo/laba	20	labaatan	200	laba boqol
3	saddex				
4	afar	25	shan iyo labaatan – 80%		
5	shan		labaatan iyo shan – 20%		
6	lix				
7	toddobo/-a	15	shan iyo toban – 98%		
8	siddeed		toban iyo shan – 2%		

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

Masculine nouns are used in the singular

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

Masculine nouns are used in the singular

mas '(a) snake' **masas** 'snakes'

laba mas 'two snakes'

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

Masculine nouns are used in the singular

mas '(a) snake' **masas** 'snakes'

laba mas 'two snakes'

aqal '(a) house' **aqallo** 'houses'

saddex aqal 'three houses'

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

Feminine nouns in **–o** take singular form.

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

Feminine nouns in **–o** take singular form.

hooyo ‘mother’ **hooyooyin** ‘mothers’

shan hooyo ‘five mothers’

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

Feminine nouns in **–o** take singular form.

hooyo ‘mother’ **hooyooyin** ‘mothers’

shan hooyo ‘five mothers’

Other feminine nouns take the ending **–ood**.

How do Somali numbers work?

After numbers, nouns are not used in the plural.

Feminine nouns in **–o** take singular form.

hooyo ‘mother’ **hooyooyin** ‘mothers’

shan hooyo ‘five mothers’

Other feminine nouns take the ending **–ood**.

kab ‘(a) shoe’ **kabo** ‘shoes’

laba kabood ‘two shoes’

Counting form

Only feminine nouns

Counting form

Only feminine nouns
that **don't** end in –o in the singular kab

Counting form

Only feminine nouns

that **don't** end in –o in the singular

kab

but end in –o in the plural

kabo

Counting form

Only feminine nouns

that **don't** end in –o in the singular

but end in –o in the plural

have a specific counting form:

kab

kabo

kabood

Counting form

Only feminine nouns

that **don't** end in –o in the singular kab

but end in –o in the plural kabo

have a specific counting form: kabood

The counting form is used after numbers.

Are numerals a word class?

In English, traditionally: Yes.

They function as determiners of nouns.

Are numerals a word class?

In English, traditionally: Yes.

They function as determiners of nouns.

English nouns are preceded by **determiners** and **modifiers**:

My two new cars.

Are numerals a word class?

In English, traditionally: Yes.

They function as determiners of nouns.

English nouns are preceded by **determiners** and **modifiers**:

My two new cars.

But in Somali, things work differently...

Cardinal numbers are nouns

baabuur 'car'

baabuurka 'the car'

baabuurkayga 'my car'

Cardinal numbers are nouns

baabuur 'car'

baabuurka 'the car'

baabuurkayga 'my car'

laba baabuur 'two cars'

labada baabuur 'the two cars'

labadayda baabuur 'my two cars'

Cardinal numbers are nouns

baabuur 'car'

baabuurka 'the car'

baabuurkayga 'my car'

laba baabuur 'two cars'

labada baabuur 'the two cars'

labadayda baabuur 'my two cars'

In Somali the head noun is inflected.

'2' is the head, 'baabuur' is a modifier.

Ordinal numbers are adjectives

Ordinal numbers are adjectives

... just like in English!

Ordinal numbers are adjectives

... just like in English!

1 koowa**aad**

6 lixa**aad**

2 laba**aad**

7 toddoba**aad**

3 saddex**aad**

8 siddeeda**aad**

4 afra**aad**

9 sagaala**aad**

5 shana**aad**

10 tobna**aad**

Ordinal numbers are adjectives

... just like in English!

1 koowa**aad**

6 lixa**aad**

2 laba**aad**

7 toddoba**aad**

3 saddex**aad**

8 siddeeda**aad**

4 afra**aad**

9 sagaala**aad**

5 shana**aad**

10 tobna**aad**

fasalka afraad '(the) fourth grade'

~~Numerals~~

The word class *Numerals* isn't necessary in Somali grammar.

~~Numerals~~

The word class *Numerals* isn't necessary in Somali grammar.

More about
– phrases that contain numbers.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

by Morgan Nilsson



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

In Swedish, German, French, Arabic...
adjectives take many different endings.

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

In Swedish, German, French, Arabic...
adjectives take many different endings.

The form of the adjective agrees with the
form of the noun it belongs to.

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

In Swedish, German, French, Arabic...
adjectives take many different endings.

The form of the adjective agrees with the
form of the noun it belongs to.

una piccola a casa a	due piccole e case e
un piccol o gatt o	due piccol i gatt i

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

English adjectives are not inflected in this way.

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

English adjectives are not inflected in this way.

a small house
the small house
two small houses

a small cat
the small cat
two small cats

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

Somali adjectives exhibit "almost" no inflection.

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

Somali adjectives exhibit "almost" no inflection.

kab **yar** 'a small shoe'

dab **yar** 'a small fire'

kabta **yar** 'the small shoe'

dabka **yar** 'the small fire'

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

Somali adjectives exhibit "almost" no inflection.

kab **yar** 'a small shoe'

dab **yar** 'a small fire'

kabta **yar** 'the small shoe'

dabka **yar** 'the small fire'

Notice that Somali adjectives always follow after the noun.

Plural?

The only inflection is reduplication.

Plural?

The only inflection is reduplication.

baal jaban 'a broken wing'

baal**al** jaban 'broken wings'

baal**al** **ja**jaban 'broken wings'

Plural?

The only inflection is reduplication.

baal jaban 'a broken wing'

baal**al** jaban 'broken wings'

baal**al** **ja**jaban 'broken wings'

guri **ja**jaban 'a broken house'

Plural?

The only inflection is reduplication.

baal jaban 'a broken wing'

baal**al** jaban 'broken wings'

baal**al** **ja**jaban 'broken wings'

guri **ja**jaban 'a broken house'

The quality is spread (distributed) to several items or several parts of a single item.

Plural? – Distributive form!

The only inflection is reduplication.

baal jaban 'a broken wing'

baal**al** jaban 'broken wings'

baal**al** **ja**jaban 'broken wings'

guri **ja**jaban 'a broken house'

The quality is spread (distributed) to several items or several parts of a single item.

Comparison

positive: big

comparative: bigger

superlative: biggest

Comparison

positive: big weyn

comparative: bigger ka weyn

superlative: biggest ugu weyn

Comparison

positive: big weyn

comparative: bigger **ka** weyn

superlative: biggest **ugu** weyn

ka ≈ than ugu ≈ "the most"

Are Somali adjectives inflected?

More about

- the distributive form
- the use of the comparative degree
- the use of the superlative degree

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

Are Somali verbs inflected?

by Morgan Nilsson



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English verbs have very few inflected forms.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English verbs have very few inflected forms.

plain form	work	write
present 3rd person singular	works s	writes s
gerund-participle	work ing	writ ing
past tense	work ed	wrot e
past participle	work ed	writt en

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English verbs are not really inflected for person.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English verbs are not really inflected for person.

1 p. sg.	I	sing
2 p. sg.	you	sing
3 p. sg.	she, he	sings
1 p. pl.	we	sing
2 p. pl.	you	sing
3 p. pl.	they	sing

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English verbs are not really inflected for person.
But Spanish verbs are.

1 p. sg.	I	sing
2 p. sg.	you	sing
3 p. sg.	she, he	sings
1 p. pl.	we	sing
2 p. pl.	you	sing
3 p. pl.	they	sing

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English verbs are not really inflected for person.
But Spanish verbs are.

1 p. sg.	canto	I	sing
2 p. sg.	cantas	you	sing
3 p. sg.	canta	she, he	sings
1 p. pl.	cantamos	we	sing
2 p. pl.	cantáis	you	sing
3 p. pl.	cantan	they	sing

Are Somali verbs inflected?

However, English verbs have progressive forms.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

However, English verbs have progressive forms.

Simple forms

I sing

I sang

I have sung

I will sing

Progressive forms

I am sing**ing**

I was sing**ing**

I have been sing**ing**

I will be sing**ing**

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English doesn't have different form for **real** events and **'imaginary'** events.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English doesn't have different form for **real** events and **'imaginary'** events.

Languages like German, Spanish and Slavic do.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

English doesn't have different form for **real** events and '**imaginary**' events.

Languages like German, Spanish and Slavic do.

Forms denoting 'imaginary' events may be called **subjunctive (konjunktiv)** in some languages, and **irrealis** in other languages.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali has all the mentioned forms

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali has all the mentioned forms
and a few others...

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for person.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for person.

I	sing	1 p. sg.	heesaa
you		2 p. sg.	heestaa

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for person.

I	sing	1 p. sg.	heesaa
you		2 p. sg.	heestaa
he		3 p. sg. m.	heesaa
she		f.	heestaa

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for person.

I	sing	1 p. sg.	heesaa	
you		2 p. sg.	heestaa	
he		3 p. sg. m.	heesaa	←
she		f.	heestaa	
they		3 p. pl.	heesaan	←

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for person.

I	sing	1 p. sg.	heesaa	
you		2 p. sg.	heestaa	←←
he		3 p. sg. m.	heesaa	←
she		f.	heestaa	
you		2 p. pl.	heestaan	←←
they		3 p. pl.	heesaan	←

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for person.

I	sing	1 p. sg.	heesaa	
you		2 p. sg.	heestaa	
he		3 p. sg. m.	heesaa	
she		f.	heestaa	
we		1 p. pl.	heesnaa	←
you		2 p. pl.	heestaan	
they		3 p. pl.	heesaan	

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for **tense** (time).

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for **tense** (time).

past

hees**ay**

‘sang’

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for **tense** (time).

past

hees**ay**

‘sang’

present

hees**aa**

‘sings’

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for **tense** (time).

past

hees**ay**

‘sang’

present

hees**aa**

‘sings’

future

heesi **doonaa**

‘will sing’

infinitive + auxiliary

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Besides **tense**, Somali verbs are also inflected for **aspect** (viewpoint).

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Besides **tense**, Somali verbs are also inflected for **aspect** (viewpoint).

simple present

hees**aa** I sing

progressive present

hees**ayaa** I am singing

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Besides **tense**, Somali verbs are also inflected for **aspect** (viewpoint).

simple present	hees aa	I sing
progressive present	hees ayaa	I am singing
simple past	hees ay	I sang
progressive past	hees ayay	I was singing
habitual past	heesi jiray	I used to sing
	infinitive + auxiliary	

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for mood.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for mood.

Mainly

realis

heesaa

sing(s)

heesayaa

is singing

heesay ...

sang

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for mood.

Mainly

realis

heesaa

sing(s)

heesayaa

is singing

heesay ...

sang

irrealis

heesoo

sing

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for mood.

Mainly

realis

heesaa

sing(s)

heesayaa

is singing

heesay ...

sang

irrealis

hees○

sing

imperative

hees

sing!

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali verbs are inflected for mood.

Mainly

realis

heesaa

sing(s)

heesayaa

is singing

heesay ...

sang

irrealis

heeso

sing

imperative

hees

sing!

conditional

heesi lahaa

(would) have sung

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali also has some other forms.

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali also has some other forms.

infinitive

qori

(to) write

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali also has some other forms.

infinitive	qori	<i>(to) write</i>
verbal noun	qorid	<i>(the) writing</i>

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali also has some other forms.

infinitive	qori i	<i>(to) write</i>
verbal noun	qori id	<i>(the) writing</i>
(past participle)	qor an	<i>(is) written</i>

Are Somali verbs inflected?

Somali also has some other forms.

infinitive	qori i	<i>(to) write</i>
verbal noun	qori id	<i>(the) writing</i>
(past participle)	qor an	<i>(is) written</i>
(gerund-participle)	qor a (m.)	<i>(a) writing (boy)</i>
	qor ta (f.)	<i>(a) writing (girl)</i>

Are Somali verbs inflected?

More about

- all the categories of the verb.



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

How are verbs inflected for person?

by Morgan Nilsson



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

How are verbs inflected for person?

English has very little inflection for person.

	sing		plur	
1 pers	I	sing	we	sing
2 pers	you	sing	you	sing
3 pers	she	sings	they	sing
	he	sings		
	it	sings		

How are verbs inflected for person?

But German, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic...
have more forms. E.g. in Spanish

I sing	1 p.	sg.	canto
you	2 p.	sg.	cantas
(s)he	3 p.	sg.	canta
we	1 p.	pl.	cantamos
you	2 p.	pl.	cantáis
they	3 p.	pl.	cantan

How are verbs inflected for person?

Somali has 7 verb forms expressing person

I	1 p.	sg.	
you	2 p.	sg.	
he/it	3 p.	sg.	maskulinum
she/it	3 p.	sg.	femininum
we	1 p.	pl.	
you	2 p.	pl.	
they	3 p.	pl.	



How are verbs inflected for person?

Somali has 2 markers for person



How are verbs inflected for person?

Somali has 2 markers for person

n – marks the plural (we, you, they)

How are verbs inflected for person?

Somali has 2 markers for person

n – marks the plural (we, you, they)

t – marks the 2nd person (you)

How are verbs inflected for person?

Somali has 2 markers for person

n – marks the plural (we, you, they)

t – marks the 2nd person (you)
and the feminine 3rd pers. singular (she)

How are verbs inflected for person?

I	1 p.sg.	
you	2 p.sg.	
he/it	3 p.sg.m.	
she/it	3 p.sg.f.	
we	1 p.pl.	n
you	2 p.pl.	n
they	3 p.pl.	n

How are verbs inflected for person?

I	1 p.sg.	
you	2 p.sg.	t
he/it	3 p.sg.m.	
she/it	3 p.sg.f.	
we	1 p.pl.	n
you	2 p.pl.	t n
they	3 p.pl.	n

How are verbs inflected for person?

I	1 p.sg.	
you	2 p.sg.	t
he/it	3 p.sg.m.	
she/it	3 p.sg.f.	t
we	1 p.pl.	n
you	2 p.pl.	t n
they	3 p.pl.	n

How are verbs inflected for person?

present tense

I	1 p.sg.	aa
you	2 p.sg.	t aa
he/it	3 p.sg.m.	aa
she/it	3 p.sg.f.	t aa
we	1 p.pl.	n aa
you	2 p.pl.	t aa n
they	3 p.pl.	aa n

How are verbs inflected for person?

		past tense
I	1 p.sg.	ay
you	2 p.sg.	t ay
he/it	3 p.sg.m.	ay
she/it	3 p.sg.f.	t ay
we	1 p.pl.	n ay
you	2 p.pl.	t ee n
they	3 p.pl.	ee n

How are verbs inflected for person?

present tense			
I	1 p.sg.	hees aa	'sing(s)'
you	2 p.sg.	hees t aa	
he/it	3 p.sg.m.	hees aa	
she/it	3 p.sg.f.	hees t aa	
we	1 p.pl.	hees n aa	
you	2 p.pl.	hees t aa n	
they	3 p.pl.	hees aa n	

How are verbs inflected for person?

		past tense	
I	1 p.sg.	hees ay	'sang'
you	2 p.sg.	hees t ay	
he/it	3 p.sg.m.	hees ay	
she/it	3 p.sg.f.	hees t ay	
we	1 p.pl.	hees n ay	
you	2 p.pl.	hees t ee n	
they	3 p.pl.	hees ee n	



How are verbs inflected for person?

More about

- sound changes in verb inflection
- inflection for tense, aspect etc...

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

How are verbs inflected for tense?

by Morgan Nilsson



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How are verbs inflected for tense?

English

Present

jump**s**

Past

jump**ed**

suffix / ending

Future

will jump

auxiliary + infinitive

How are verbs inflected for tense?

Somali

Present

hees**aa**

Past

hees**ay**

suffix / ending

Future

heesi **doonaa**

infinitive + auxiliary

How are verbs inflected for tense?

All tenses are also inflected for person with /t/, /n/

	sings	sang	will sing
1 p.sg.	hees ^{aa}	hees ^{ay}	heesi ⁱ doon ^{aa}
2 p.sg.	heest ^{taa}	heest ^{ay}	heesi ⁱ doont ^{taa}
3 p.sg.m.	hees ^{aa}	hees ^{ay}	heesi ⁱ doon ^{aa}
3 p.sg.f.	heest ^{taa}	heest ^{ay}	heesi ⁱ doont ^{taa}
1 p.pl.	hees ^{naa}	hees ^{nay}	heesi ⁱ doon ^{naa}
2 p.pl.	heest ^{taan}	heest ^{teen}	heesi ⁱ doont ^{taan}
3 p.pl.	hees ^{aan}	hees ^{een}	heesi ⁱ doon ^{aan}

How are verbs inflected for tense?

Present tense has simple and progressive forms.

	I sing	I am singing	
1 p.sg.	heesaa	heesayaa	
2 p.sg.	heestaa	heesaysaa	t > s after y
3 p.sg.m.	heesaa	heesayaa	
3 p.sg.f.	heestaa	heesaysaa	
1 p.pl.	heesnaa	heesaynaa	
2 p.pl.	heestaanaa	heesaysaanaa	
3 p.pl.	heesaanaa	heesayaanaa	

How are verbs inflected for tense?

Past tense has simple, progressive and habitual.

	sang	was singing	used to sing
1 p.sg.	heesay	hees ay ay	heesi i jiray
2 p.sg.	hees tay	hees ay s ay	heesi i jir tay
3 p.sg.m.	heesay	hees ay ay	heesi i jiray
3 p.sg.f.	hees tay	hees ay s ay	heesi i jir tay
1 p.pl.	hees nay	hees ay n ay	heesi i jir nay
2 p.pl.	hees tay teen	hees ay s ay een	heesi i jir tay teen
3 p.pl.	hees tay een	hees ay s ay een	heesi i jir tay een

How are verbs inflected for tense?

More about

- sound alternations in verb inflection
- the use and the forms of the individual tenses
- the use and the forms of the individual aspects



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HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

by Morgan Nilsson



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How are verbs inflected for aspect?

English verbs have grammatical aspect:
simple forms and **progressive** forms.

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

English verbs have grammatical aspect:
simple forms and **progressive** forms.

I **bake** every Friday

I **am baking** bread

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

English verbs have grammatical aspect:
simple forms and **progressive** forms.

I **bake** every Friday

I **am baking** bread

He **waits** for me at the bus stop

He **is waiting** for me at the bus stop

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

The two aspects occur in different tenses.

simple **present**

I sing

progressive **present**

I am singing

simple **past**

I sang

progressive **past**

I was singing



How are verbs inflected for aspect?

Somali is very similar to English.

Aspect is an obligatory grammatical category.



How are verbs inflected for aspect?

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You **have** to make a choice

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

Somali is very similar to English.

Aspect is an obligatory grammatical category.

You **have** to make a choice between

simple **present**

hees**aa**

'I sing'

progressive present

hees**ayaa**

'I am singing'

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

Somali is very similar to English.

Aspect is an obligatory grammatical category.

You **have** to make a choice between

simple present

heesaa

'I sing'

progressive present

heesayaa

'I am singing'

simple past

heesay

'I sang (once)'

progressive past

heesayay

'I was singing'

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

Somali is very similar to English.

Aspect is an obligatory grammatical category.

You **have** to make a choice between

simple present	heesaa	'I sing'
progressive present	heesayaa	'I am singing'
simple past	hees ay	'I sang (once)'
progressive past	hees ayay	'I was singing'
habitual past	heesi jiray	'I used to sing'



Progressive aspect

Progressive forms contain –ay–.

Simple present & past

	sing(s)	sang
1 p.sg.	heesaa	heesay
2 p.sg.	heestaa	heestay
3 p.sg.m.	heesaa	heesay
3 p.sg.f.	heestaa	heestay
1 p.pl.	heesnaa	heesnay
2 p.pl.	heestaaan	heesteen
3 p.pl.	heesaaan	heeseen

Progressive present & past

	I am singing	I was singing	
1 p.sg.	hees ay aa	hees ay ay	
2 p.sg.	hees ay saa	hees ay say	t > s after y
3 p.sg.m.	hees ay aa	hees ay ay	
3 p.sg.f.	hees ay saa	hees ay say	
1 p.pl.	hees ay naa	hees ay nay	
2 p.pl.	hees ay saaan	hees ay seen	
3 p.pl.	hees ay aan	hees ay een	



Progressive aspect

Progressive forms contain –ay–

Person marker –t– > –s– after –y–

Progressive aspect

Progressive forms contain –ay–

Person marker –t– > –s– after –y–

Progressive forms express **on-going** actions which are **in the middle of their process** at the moment that one is referring to.



Habitual past

Formed with the auxiliary **jiray** *used to*.



Habitual past

Formed with the auxiliary **jiray** *used to*.

heesi jiray *I used to sing*
infinitive + auxiliary

Habitual past

Formed with the auxiliary **jiray** *used to*.

heesi jiray *I used to sing*

infinitive + auxiliary

Main verb in the infinitive.

Auxiliary in the past tense.

Habitual past

Formed with the auxiliary **jiray** *used to*.

heesi jiray *I used to sing*

infinitive + auxiliary

Main verb in the infinitive.

Auxiliary in the past tense.

Habitual past tense expresses
repeated actions in the past.

Simple past tense expresses **single** actions.

How are verbs inflected for aspect?

More about

- sound changes in the verb inflection,
- the tenses,
- the moods.



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HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

How to form the imperative

by Morgan Nilsson



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How to form the imperative

The imperative is used to express commands.



How to form the imperative

The imperative is used to express commands.

Look!

Come here.

Help me.

Explain how this happened!

How to form the imperative

The imperative is used to express commands.

Look!

Come here.

Help me.

Explain how this happened!

The English imperative = the base form.

The imperative has no ending.

How to form the imperative

In Somali, the imperative = the verb stem.
The imperative has no ending.

Present Tense

hees**aa**

Imperativ

hees !



How to form the imperative

In English it doesn't matter how many persons an imperative verb form is directed to.

How to form the imperative

In English it doesn't matter how many persons an imperative verb form is directed to.

In German, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic... there are different form depending on the number of persons addressed.

How to form the imperative

In English it doesn't matter how many persons an imperative verb form is directed to.

In German, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic... there are different form depending on the number of persons addressed.

Spanish
sing!

Singular
¡canta!

Plural
¡canten!

How to form the imperative

Somali has two imperative form. One is used to address one person, and the other, ending in **-a**, is used to address several persons.

Pres. Tense	Imperativ Sing.	Plural	
hees aa	1. hees !	hees a !	sing!

How to form the imperative

Some verbs behave a bit differently.
They have a stem that ends in **vowel**, and
therefore insert a **-y-** before a following **vowel**.

Pres. Tense	Imperativ Sing.	Plural	
heesaa	1. hees !	heesa !	sing!

How to form the imperative

Some verbs behave a bit differently.
They have a stem that ends in **vowel**, and
therefore insert a **-y-** before a following **vowel**.

Pres. Tense	Imperativ Sing.	Plural	
heesaa	1. hees !	heesa !	sing!
sameeyaa	2. samee !	sameeya !	do!

How to form the imperative

If the stem ends in **-ad-/-d-/-t-**, that suffix disappears in the imperative singular, which instead ends in **-o**.

Pres. Tense	Imperativ Sing.	Plural	
hees aa	1. hees !	hees a !	sing!
samee yaa	2. samee !	samee ya !	do!

How to form the imperative

If the stem ends in **-ad-/-d-/-t-**, that suffix disappears in the imperative singular, which instead ends in **-o**.

Pres. Tense	Imperativ Sing.	Plural	
hees aa	1. hees !	hees a !	sing!
samee yaa	2. samee !	samee ya !	do!
iibs adaa	3. iibs o !	iibs ada !	buy!

3 Conjugational Classes

The imperative is formed in slightly different ways in the three conjugational classes. That is one of the major reasons for the division of the Somali verbs into three classes or conjugations.

Pres. Tense	Imperativ Sing.	Plural	
heesaa	1. hees !	heesa !	sing!
sameeyaa	2. samee !	sameeya !	do!
iibsadaa	3. iibs o !	iibsada !	buy!



3 conjugation classes

More about

- the inflection in the three different conjugations.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

by Morgan Nilsson



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Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The English infinitive has no ending.

It is used after auxiliary verbs and the word *to*.

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

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It is used after auxiliary verbs and the word *to*.

will **sing**, may **eat**, must **stop**, can **pay**

used to **read**, loves to **talk**

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The English infinitive has no ending.

It is used after auxiliary verbs and the word *to*.

will **sing**, may **eat**, must **stop**, can **pay**

used to **read**, loves to **talk**

I asked you to **clean** the windows.

I watched them **clean** the windows.

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The infinitive ends in **–i** or **–n**.

It is used **before** auxiliary verbs.

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The infinitive ends in **-i** or **-n**.

It is used **before** auxiliary verbs.

heesi <i>i</i> doonaa	<i>will sing</i>
heesi <i>i</i> jiray	<i>used to sing</i>
heesi <i>i</i> lahaa	<i>would sing, would have sung</i>
heesi <i>i</i> karaa	<i>can sing</i>
heesi <i>i</i> waayaa	<i>cannot sing</i>

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The infinitive ends in **-i** or **-n**.

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The infinitive ends in **–i** or **–n**.

	present	future
<i>sings</i>	hees aa	hees i doonaa

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The infinitive ends in **–i** or **–n**.

	present	future
<i>sings</i>	hees aa	hees i doonaa

If the present tense ends in **–yaa**
then the infinitive ends in **–n**.

<i>gives</i>	siiy aa	siin n doonaa
--------------	----------------	----------------------

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

The infinitive ends in **–i** or **–n**.

	present	future
<i>sings</i>	hees aa	hees i doonaa
<i>does</i>	sameey aa	samey n doonaa

If the present tense ends in **–(a)daa/–(a)taa**
then the infinitive ends in **–an**.

<i>buys</i>	iibs adaa	iibs an doonaa
-------------	------------------	-----------------------

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

These differences in the infinitive is one of the reasons for dividing Somali verbs into three groups or conjugations.

	present	future
<i>sings</i>	heesaa	1. heesi doonaa
<i>does</i>	sameeyaa	2. sameeyn doonaa
<i>buys</i>	iibsadaa	3. iibsan doonaa

Is there an infinitive form in Somali?

More about

- the three conjugations or verb groups
- auxiliaries

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

How do you build a simple clause?

by Morgan Nilsson



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How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal English clause usually contains

subject + predicate

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal English clause usually contains

subject + predicate

She laughed.

People work.

Sugar kills.

Hur bildar man en enkel sats?

A minimal **Somali** clause usually contains

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal **Somali** clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject **pronoun** + predicate

What's a sentence particle?

Something like a clausal adverb (not, surely...)

What's a sentence particle?

Something like a clausal adverb (not, surely...)

Words that classify sentences into types

What's a sentence particle?

Something like a clausal adverb (not, surely...)

Words that classify sentences into types, e.g.
waa declarative or wh-question

What's a sentence particle?

Something like a clausal adverb (not, surely...)

Words that classify sentences into types, e.g.

waa declarative or wh-question

ma yes/no-question (with realis verb)

má negative statement (with irrealis verb)

ha prohibition, warning

há wish, urge, encouragement

What's a sentence particle?

Something like a clausal adverb (not, surely...)

Words that classify sentences into types, e.g.

waa declarative or wh-question

ma yes/no-question (with realis verb)

má negative statement (with irrealis verb)

ha prohibition, warning

há wish, urge, encouragement

are called **sentence type particles**.

What's a sentence particle?

Also words that put a certain constituent in focus or in the foreground.

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baa / ayaa focus the preceding phrase.

What's a sentence particle?

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waxaa focuses the last phrase of the sentence.

What's a sentence particle?

Also words that put a certain constituent in focus or in the foreground.

baa / ayaa focus the preceding phrase.

waxaa focuses the last phrase of the sentence.

They are **focus** particles.

What's a subject pronoun?

	singular	plural
1st person	I	we
2nd person	you	you
3rd person	she he it	they

What's a subject pronoun?

	singular		plural
1st person	I	aan	we
2nd person	you	aad	you
3rd person	she	ay	they
	he	uu	
	it		

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject **pronoun** + predicate

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject pronoun + predicate

She arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject **pronoun** + predicate

Waa

She arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject **pronoun** + predicate

Waa ay

She arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject **pronoun** + predicate

Waa ay timid.

She arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject **pronoun** + predicate

Waa ay timid.

Amina she arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject **pronoun** + predicate

	Waa	ay	timid.
Amina		she	arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + **subject pronoun** + predicate

Aamina waa **ay** timid.

Aamina she arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject pronoun + predicate

Aamina waa ay timid.

Aamina arrived.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject pronoun + predicate

type

Aamina waa ay qoraysaa buug.

Aamina is writing a book.

How do you build a simple clause?

A minimal Somali clause usually contains

sentence particle + subject pronoun + predicate

focus

Aamina waxa ay qoraysaa buug.

Amina is writing a **BOOK**.

How do you build a simple clause?

More about

- sentence type particles,
- focus particles,
- use of subject pronouns,
- different types of clauses:
questions, commands, wishes, etc...,
clauses with more constituents,
subordinate clauses.

HOW DOES SOMALI GRAMMAR WORK?

WHAT ARE SENTENCE PARTICLES?

by Morgan Nilsson



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What are sentence particles?

Sentence particles are small words that some languages use to express what kind of sentence it is.

Some languages have a several such particles, other languages don't have many, or none at all.

Somali has a sentence particle in practically **every** sentence.

What are sentence particles?

Some languages mark a question with a word or an expression.

Finnish

Sinä olet somalialainen.

‘You are Somali.’

Olet**ko** sinä somalialainen?

‘Are you Somali?’

French

Tu es somalien.

‘You are Somali.’

Est-ce que tu es somalien?

‘Are you Somali?’

The Declarative particle

Somali even marks declarative statements with the particle **waa**.

Xasan **waa** Soomaali. ‘Hassan is a Somali.’

Sahro **waa** timid. ‘Sahra arrived.’

Sahro **waa ay** timid.

The Declarative particle

The declarative particle **waa** is also used in questions with a question word.

Kani waa maxay?

‘What is this?’

Tani waa tuma?

‘Who is this? (about a woman)’

Kani waa kuma?

‘Who is this? (about a man)’

The Interrogative particle

The Somali interrogative particle **ma** is used in questions that can be answered with *yes* or *no*.

Before a verb, just use **ma** instead of **waa**.

Sahro ma timid? ‘Did Sahra arrive.’

The Focus particle

If the predicate part of a question is a noun,
you need to emphasize that noun.

You do that by adding the focus particle **baa**.

Xasan **ma** **Soomaali** **baa**? 'Is Hassan Somali.'

Fused particles

The two particles **ma + baa** may fuse.

The contraction **miyaa** then goes after the predicate noun.

Xasan ma Soomaali baa? ‘Is Hassan Somali.’

= Xasan Soomaali miyaa?

Some patterns

Kani **waa** maxay?

‘What is this?’

Waa maxay kani?

☹ yes/no

Kani **waa** miis.

‘This is a table.’

Kani **ma** miis **baa**?

‘Is this a table?’

Kani miis **miyaa**?

☺ yes/no

Haa, kani **waa** miis.

‘Yes, this is a table.’

Maya, kani **waa** kursi.

‘No, this is a chair.’

Some patterns

Kani **waa** kuma?

‘Who is this?’

Waa kuma kani?

Kani **ma** Xasan **baa**?

‘Is this Hassan?’

Kani Xasan **miyaa**?

Haa, kani **waa** Xasan.

‘Yes, this is Hassan.’

Maya, kani **waa** Axmed.

‘No, this is Ahmed.’

Some patterns

Tani **waa** tuma?

‘Who is this?’

Waa tuma tani?

Tani **ma** Maryan **baa**?

‘Is this Maryam?’

Tani Maryan **miyaa**?

Haa, tani **waa** Maryan.

‘Yes, this is Maryam.’

Maya, tani **waa** Sahro.

‘No, this is Sahra.’

Some patterns

Maryan **ma** macallimad **baa**?

‘Is Maryam a teacher?’

Maryan macallimad **miyaa**?

Haa, Maryan **waa** macallimad.

‘Yes, Maryam is a teacher.’

Maya, Maryan **waa** ardayad.

‘No, Maryam is a student.’